

INTRODUCTION.

The following information on the Gros Ventre was collected in the winter [2] and early spring of 1901, at the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana, as part of the Mrs. Morris K. Jesup Expedition. Very few of the statements made, unless such is obviously the case, are based on observation. In general, where nothing is said to the contrary, they are founded on statements made by the Indians. The introductory explanations that have been made in regard to the Arapaho¹ apply also to the following material. The alphabet used for rendering Gros Ventre words is the same as that employed for Arapaho. Additional sounds are ö and ü; which are open, and k', a palatal k. [104]

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION.

The Gros Ventre call themselves "Haäninin." The meaning of this [101] term is sometimes given as "lime-men" or "chalk-men," from haä'a'tyi ("lime" or "soft white stone"). This etymology is, however, doubtful. In literature they have often been known as the "Atsina." They declare this to be the Piegan name for themselves, atsöna". Historically the Gros Ventre are known to have formed an independent tribe closely associated with the Blackfeet during the nineteenth century. Their dialect is similar [197] to the Arapaho, and certainly intelligible to the Arapaho for at least the greater part. The two dialects are, however, sufficiently differentiated to make it certain that the tribes have been more or less distinct for a longer period than two centuries. The Arapaho regard the Gros Ventre as the northernmost one of a group of five closely affiliated or related tribes of [101] which they themselves form the largest. Three of these tribes have long [648] been extinct as separate bodies, and only the dialects of one or two survive among a few individuals with the Arapaho. The Gros Ventre, perhaps

¹ A. L. Kroeber, *The Arapaho* (Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History, Vol. XVIII, Parts I, II, and IV, New York, 1902, 1904, and 1907). A series of Gros Ventre myths and tales has been published in *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*, Vol. I, Part III, New York, 1907.

PREFACE

This reconstruction of Gros Ventre life as it had been lived before the disappearance of the buffalo around 1884 is the result of a joint undertaking. When the late Dr. John M. Cooper visited the Fort Belknap Reservation in 1938, he met there a group of older men who were interested in having him cooperate with them in the making of a record of their "old way of life." The project was then undertaken and continued by Dr. Cooper in the summers of 1939 and 1940. It was upon the invitation of the Gros Ventres that I went to the Reservation in 1940 to work with the women and to deal mainly with matters other than the religious aspects of their culture. Pressure of other duties, combined with ill-health, prevented Dr. Cooper's return to the field after 1940, but the taking of the record was subsequently continued by me in the summers of 1945 and 1948.

The results are presented in two parts, Part I on Social Life is the more general, giving a background for Part II which deals exclusively with Religion. The writing of Part II had been practically completed by Dr. Cooper at the time of his death in 1949; it will appear as a separate volume under his name.

It is my privilege to thank all of the Gros Ventres who cooperated in the taking of the record. In 1945 and in 1948 preliminary drafts of the material were checked and revised in the field. In spite of all precautions it is not unlikely that some errors may remain. For these the Gros Ventres themselves are in no way responsible. The onus, especially for any misrepresentation of the Gros Ventre point of view, must rest entirely on us.

While Dr. Cooper financed his own field work, I am indebted to the Charles and Grace E. Lastner Fund for part of my field expense in 1940 and in 1945, and to the Research Fund of The Catholic University of America, for the grant which enabled me to return to the Fort Belknap Reservation for the summer of 1948.

To the School Sisters of St. Francis, who at no small inconvenience to themselves accommodated my husband and me at St. Paul's School, we are deeply grateful. We wish likewise to

SOCIAL MECHANISMS IN GROS VENTRE GAMBLING

REGINA FLANNERY AND JOHN M. COOPER

INTRODUCTION

THE PRESENT PAPER is offered as a modest start toward opening up 121
what looks like a promising field, namely, the social implications of gambling. 114

Our anthropological sources yield a fairly generous amount of information 525
on the world distribution of gambling,¹ the games and sports gambled on, the
valuables wagered, the payment of gambling debts, and the ritual accompani-
ments of gambling. On the other hand, the same sources yield extremely meager
information, and for most gambling peoples none at all, on such social aspects
of gambling as: its mode of meshing into the prevalent social organization (who
gambles, with whom, and for what); its effectiveness in fulfilling or thwarting
the wishes of the individual gambler and in meeting or blocking the needs of
integral and fractional social groups; individual differences in participation and
the motivations responsible for them; native attitudes toward gambling; the
economic and other factors that are favorable or unfavorable to the rise and
persistence of gambling in culture as such or in given cultures. Field and library
studies of these and most other social aspects of gambling have been almost
entirely neglected by anthropologists.² And, so far as the present writers have
been able to discover from rapid search among the sociological sources and from
random inquiries among their sociological friends, such studies have also been
almost entirely neglected by the sociologists, even by those specializing in the
area of delinquency.

The following pages are an attempt to present the gambling complex, with 121
emphasis on certain of its social aspects, as it existed during the second half of 525
the last century among the Gros Ventre of Montana. Most of the complex
is now a thing of the past. New gambling games, particularly playing cards,
have superseded the old, and gambling itself, on the reservation and among the [178]
Gros Ventre in general, is not the tense and meaningful activity it used to be.

The data on which this paper is based were gathered, incidentally to a gen-121

1 World distribution is spotty and far from universal. A summarized world distribution, based on several hundred sources, is given in J. M. Cooper, *Temporal Sequence and the Marginal Cultures* (Anthropological Series, Catholic University of America, no. 10, 1941), pp. 67-68.

2 Father Gerald Desmond's *Gambling among the Yakima*, from his field study of 1944, a manuscript now being prepared for publication, is devoted largely to the social aspects.

- 121 eral study of the social organization and religion of the Gros Ventre, at the Fort Belknap Reservation, Montana, in about equal proportions by Flannery in the summers of 1940 and 1945 and by Cooper in the summers of 1939 and 1940, from Gros Ventre informants, mostly of the older generation. In most cases we used interpreters; in some, we communicated in English. Our chief informants on gambling were: The Boy (b.1872, our most important source, who had gotten a good deal of his information from his father, Lame Bull, b.1825, d.1908), Thick (b. ca. 1870-71), Charles John Buckman (b.1872), Mrs Takes-a-Prisoner Warrior (b. ca. 1850-55) and Mrs Singer Sleeping-Bear (b. ca. 1860). These informants were exceptionally intelligent and dependable, and were not only willing to give us the information they had but anxious to do so. In spite of this, not all the past could, of course, be recaptured, and in certain parts the picture we got is far from complete, particularly regarding individual differences and motivations. However, we have had extremely little reconstruction proper to do, as most of the older gambling complex survived up to near the turn of the century, and had been actively participated in and/or witnessed and was vividly remembered by our informants, while some parts of it, especially many of the social aspects thereof, have persisted down to the present.

WAGERS AND BETTING PROCEDURE

- 525 Stakes wagered by the Gros Ventre may be divided into small or trivial ones and big or valuable ones. Small stakes consisted of such things as arrows, bows, bags, beads, pipes, knives, handkerchiefs, dishes, and so forth; big ones, of such things as guns, saddles, lodges, and especially horses (the chief wealth in the old days). Wives were never wagered. Two teams might play mostly for fun, the losers being merely expected or obligated to provide a smoke, or, as more commonly, refreshments or a meal—"to cook," as the current expression goes—for the winners. This last was seemingly the only type of non-dyadic wagering in vogue among the Gros Ventre, if it can be called wagering at all, for such provision of smokes or food for relatives and friends was an everyday custom. Mrs Sleeping-Bear stated that in a gambling game she once played with her husband's brother, she forfeited her eyebrows, which he pulled out, but whether this was an exceptional occurrence or a customary one within the prevalent pattern of rough familiarity between brother-in-law and sister-in-law we could not discover.

Betting was typically dyadic, a given individual matching the wager of another individual, and the stakes going to the winning individual. The dyadic system was kept to even where, as was common, betting was by sides, each side,

THE GROS VENTRE SHAKING TENT

REGINA FLANNERY

The Catholic University of America

• 121 **A**LTHOUGH the concept of the shaking tent is now known to be a widespread one, relatively few details are available on this rite as it was practiced in the Plains area. The following [115] data, gathered among the Gros Ventres of Montana in 1940 from old and middle-aged informants who had often witnessed the performance, are offered in an attempt to fill in the picture as regards this one tribe.

787 When speaking English, the Gros Ventres refer to the rite as a "seance" and to the performer as a "spiritualist" inasmuch as it was carried out by a person who had access to the spirit of a deceased relative. The Gros Ventre word for spirit is *tsatsuvaa*, which, incidentally, is the same word they now use for radio. The voice of the spirit can be heard, and, while the spirit cannot be seen, its presence is otherwise manifest by the noise of its activities. Among the latter we note especially the shaking of the tent as the spirit enters and leaves.

[791] When information was desired regarding missing persons, the whereabouts of the enemy, etc., a spiritualist, who might be either a man or a woman, was asked to invoke the spirit over which he or she had control. The pertinent questions were asked and the spirit would supply the answers. There were two general methods of procedure. The so-called seance could be held either in the big dwelling lodge or in a small structure built for the occasion. Furthermore the performance was more or less elaborate, details differing according to circumstances, the individual spiritualist, and even the "personality" of the spirit invoked. But one invariable feature was the shaking of the tent.

The two accounts which follow will illustrate the general pattern as well as the differences in procedure. The first concerns a seance held in the winter at a time when this particular family

THE SHAKING TENT RITE AMONG PLAINS AND FOREST ALGONQUIANS

JOHN M. COOPER

The Catholic University of America

121 THE purpose of the present paper is to bring together and
114 make available some scattered field notes on the conjuring
and "shaking tent" complex of northern North America, a sub-
ject that has recently evoked a good deal of discussion, particu-
larly in the valuable interpretative monographs of Ray and
Hallowell.¹ The data to be presented are from the Algonquian-
speaking Montagnais, Cree, Ojibwa, Blood-Blackfoot, and Gros
Ventre (of Montana), and the Siouan-speaking Assiniboiné.
Only certain high-light features of the Montagnais, Cree, and
Ojibwa rite will be mentioned; the complete field data gathered
by the writer will be given in monographs to be published later.
On the Blood-Blackfoot, Gros Ventre, and Assiniboiné, my field
data will be given here in full. Information obtained on the
Blood-Blackfoot and Assiniboiné shaking tent rite is very frag-
mentary. It was gotten under conditions that did not leave time
or opportunity for detailed investigation. Leisurely field work
on this item among these people would in all probability net a
much ampler yield. Information on the Gros Ventre rite is much
fuller, but, even so, is probably not exhaustive.

GROS VENTRE RITE

114 It was in 1931 during a very brief one-day reconnaissance
787 visit to the Fort Belknap Reservation that the writer first heard
of the shaking tent rite among the Gros Ventres, from a group

¹ V. F. Ray, Historic backgrounds of the conjuring complex in the
Plateau and the Plains, in L. Spier et al., ed., *Language, culture, and per-
sonality: Essays in memory of Edward Sapir*, Menasha, Wis., 1941, 204-16,
bibl. 215-16; A. L. Hallowell, *The role of conjuring in Saulteaux so-
ciety*, Publ., Philadelphia anthropological society, v. 2, Phila., 1942, incl.
bibl. pp. 89-96.

[p.39]

PRIMITIVE MAN

Quarterly Bulletin
of the
Catholic Anthropological Conference

Vol. 20

Washington 17, D. C., July, 1947

No. 3

THE CHANGING FORM AND FUNCTIONS OF THE GROS VENTRE GRASS DANCE

REGINA FLANNERY

Catholic University of America

THE purpose of the present paper is to discuss the changing form, and to show as far as possible the changing functions, of the Grass dance in Gros Ventre culture from the time of its introduction between 1875 and 1880 up to about 1920 when it had paled off to relative insignificance. 121 ●

The Gros Ventre tribe of Montana was one of the many which adopted the Grass dance, sometimes called the Omaha dance, as it spread rapidly over the northern plains in relatively recent times. Wissler studied the distribution and diffusion of the Grass dance as a trait-complex,¹ basing his interpretation upon his own observations, especially among the Blackfeet, and on the descriptions of this dance as published for other tribes. For the Gros Ventres he depended mainly on Kroeber's data,² the only source available, but he himself had visited that tribe and collected, among other specimens, regalia used by them in the Grass 796 177 796 114

¹ Wissler, C., General discussion of shamanistic and dancing societies, AMNH-AP 11, pt. 12 1916, pp. 862-71.

² Kroeber, A. L., Ethnology of the Gros Ventre, AMNH-AP 1, pt. 4, 1908, pp. 234, 238-39.

796 dance.³ Wissler was well aware of the importance of the Grass
114 dance in the transition period of Plains culture from the old to
the new, and suggested further studies be made. Nevertheless,
no one has given us a close-up, so far as I know, of its dynamic
aspects in the life of any one of the tribes who shared the phen-
omenon.

796 In 1901 Kroeber noted that the Grass dance as then performed
114 by the Gros Ventres differed considerably in form from that
177 which was described to him as having been the case when it was
first adopted. He gives us a brief description of the earlier pro-
cedure, but naturally enough no details regarding the then current
method of carrying out the Grass dance, since his concern was
with the older tribal culture. He merely states: "It is no longer
a young man's dance, nor confined to a certain group. All the
people in the tribe take part in it. It is very similar in character
to the present-day Arapaho crow-dance, as well as in the place it
occupies in the life of the people. Among the Gros Ventre it is
now the only dance held."⁴ Our data, gathered during two visits
to the Fort Belknap Reservation in 1940 and 1945, confirm
Kroeber's and supplement them to a considerable extent.

● 121 In treating of the Grass dance then, we shall distinguish be-
128 tween an earlier period extending from between 1875 to 1880 up
to about 1890, and a later period comprising the years from
roughly 1890 to 1916. We shall first describe the form of the
Grass dance as it was in the earlier period, then the changes
which were later introduced, and finally we shall discuss the
varying functions during both periods.

THE FORM: EARLIER PERIOD

796 According to Wissler the dance originated with the Dakota
177 about 1860 and is traceable as a development of the older Pawnee
171

³ These specimens are in the American Museum of Natural History. Some
of those used in the Gros Ventre Grass dance have been described by
Kroeber, loc. cit.: fork, pp. 270-71; spoon, p. 271; whip, p. 271; crow-belt,
pp. 271-72.

⁴ Kroeber, loc. cit., p. 238.

INDIVIDUAL VARIATION IN CULTURE

Regina Flannery

It is generally accepted that what Benedict called the Dionysian configuration of Plains culture represents a dominant, if not the only trend. By definition a configuration is a generalization lying behind and explaining a number of cultural patterns. A pattern itself is of course an abstraction from the behavior of a number of individuals. The behavior of any one person may vary at different times in respect to a particular type of situation, but it is unlikely that the individual will show the whole range of possible behavior within a pattern; it will cover only a portion thereof. As Linton pointed out, the difference between the individual mode within this segment, and the mode of the behaviors on which the pattern is based, reflects the compromise which every individual has to make between the culture patterns of his society and his own inclinations. It would seem further, then, that if the modes of an individual's behavior-ranges show a consistent displacement with respect to a large series of patterns, it is safe to assume that the direction of this displacement reflects some quality of the individual.¹ The question we wish to raise is this: If the aspect of personality thus revealed runs counter to a dominant trend of his culture, is the individual a misfit in that society?

In attempting an answer, let us examine some individual variations within those patterns of Plains culture in which expression of emotional excess, and dangerous experience were expected of women in one Plains society, that of the Gros Ventres of Montana. We shall outline in some detail the behavior of one Gros Ventre woman in respect of these selected patterns—from which the Dionysian configuration was abstracted—and contrast her behavior with that of others of approximately the same age. All had participated as adults in the old way of life before the disappearance of the buffalo in 1887.

In Gros Ventre culture, as in all the Plains, there was high valuation placed on direct contact of the individual with the supernatural through dreams and visions. Men could actively seek such contact by employing dangerous means, and did so in order to obtain many kinds of power. While women did not go on the actual power quest, they might acquire medicine powers and less frequently, perhaps, powers of clairvoyance. Medicine powers were considered dangerous in that, it was believed, by accepting them a limitation was put upon the life span of the practitioner. But the rewards in terms of prestige for successful performance and of payment for services were high for women as well as for men. Not every individual man was successful in his quest, nor of course was every woman vouchsafed the kinds of dreams which were requisite. Coming Daylight, the woman whose behavior we are examining in particular, was what her contemporaries considered fortunate indeed in having been offered curing powers of several kinds. Nevertheless she rejected the possibility each time, in spite of the fact that she had a living example in the person of her father's sister of what it could mean in prestige to a woman who accepted. As the reasons for her refusal seem significant I shall describe her experience in her own words.

[p. 87]

and, each time he attempted to get to his knees, one of two women who had already reached the scene would strike him on the buttocks with the flat side of a hatchet, making an insulting remark, and both would laugh. Coming Daylight hesitated at some distance from where the other two were gloating over the fallen enemy. When one of them, Woman Chief by name, saw her she ran to her saying: "Why are you standing so far off?" She grabbed her by the arm and pushed a big club into her hand, saying: "He is still alive—you will do a great thing. *Ahe:ya!*" Woman Chief forced Coming Daylight to strike him.

While both Woman Chief and Coming Daylight closely approximated the ideal for women as faithful wives and efficient workers who gave generously of their material goods to and on behalf of their relatives, they seemingly differed in temperament. Woman Chief was known as a very brave woman, and Coming Daylight was frank in admitting she would never have dreamed of doing the kinds of things for which Woman Chief was renowned. One of the latter's exploits, for example, was as follows. The Gros Ventres and Crow were allies in an encounter with the Piegan. The battle was in full force, but one Crow had withdrawn and was sitting motionless astride his horse at some distance from the melee. Woman Chief, who in contrast to most women was always well mounted, dashed up to the Crow, grabbed his wand from his hand, and rode pellmell into the thick of the battle, counting coups right and left. So brave was she considered in having really risked her life that she was accorded the distinction, most unusual for a woman, of being led around the camp circle with the victorious warriors. Furthermore, so many people came to sing in front of her lodge that she and her relatives, to show their appreciation of the honor, were forced to give away as much property as though she were a man. Judging on the basis of other biographical material, there can be no doubt that she gloried in her reputation and took every opportunity to enhance it. She was one to whom the more violent aspects of Gros Ventre culture were exceedingly congenial.

If we compare and contrast these two women we can say that insofar as the patterns of Dionysian configuration are the basis of the comparison, their behavior exhibits opposite extremes, the one going beyond the average in the direction of the configuration, the other running counter to and participating less than the average therein. Both might be termed deviant personalities in Honigman's sense of the term,² one overplaying and the other underplaying modal behavior in these selected patterns. Nevertheless, neither seems to have been a misfit insofar as each represents an extreme of socially accepted or sanctioned behavior within those patterns. If, for instance, Coming Daylight had been completely negative, and refused, say, to carry out at least the culturally defined minimum for mourning, had she, in addition to refusing to mutilate herself for the recovery of her ill relatives, neglected as an adult even the safe and less strenuous means to that end, she would have fallen without the pale, so to speak, and have been a misfit. If, at the opposite end of the scale, Woman Chief had gone further in the direction of masculinity, had she actually gone on raiding expeditions and herself stolen horses from the camp of the enemy, had she learned to shoot the bow and arrow or gun, or had she so much as adopted the vocabulary and/or pronunciation proper for males in the Gros Ventres language, she would have been carrying things too far. She, too, would have been dubbed a misfit.